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SUBJECT: CLOSED COUNCIL SESSION LEAVES LITTLE DOUBT OF
HIZBALLAH ARMS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

REF: 77018

Classified By: Ambassador Wolff for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On July 23 Alain LeRoy, UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, briefed Security Council members in consultations on the July 14 explosion of an arms cache in southern Lebanon and obstruction of UNIFIL's movements and initial investigation. LeRoy said the cache represented a clear violation of Security Council resolution 1701, that the arms depot was actively maintained and the weapons in good condition, and that evidence pointed to Hizballah's involvement. Most Council members agreed with LeRoy's assessment that the cache was a violation of 1701, and without directly naming Hizballah as the responsible party, most delegations made unequivocal references to it as the culprit. Almost all members said they welcomed the joint investigation by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and UNIFIL and looked forward to its results, and stressed the need for absolute freedom of movement for UNIFIL troops. Israeli overflights over Lebanese territory were criticized by several members but were not the focus of any Council member's statement. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) DPKO U/S LeRoy on July 23 briefed Security Council members in consultations on the explosion of an arms cache in southern Lebanon and obstruction of UNIFIL's movements, and initial investigation at the scene. LeRoy gave a strong presentation that did not shy away from pointing fingers at Hizballah and the severity of the arms build-up. LeRoy said the arms cache explosion on July 14 clearly represented a serious violation of Security Council resolution 1701. He stated that UNIFIL had not previously identified the site of the arms cache as a suspect location and judged there was no evidence that arms had been smuggled to that location since the passage of 1701 in 2006. However, LeRoy said the site was actively maintained, the arms contained inside were in good condition, and a number of indications suggested the depot belonged to Hizballah.

¶3. (C) LeRoy continued that on July 15 UNIFIL was discouraged from entering the area to investigate. The persons obstructing UNIFIL's entry to the site, he said, were identified as being connected to Hizballah and appeared to be removing evidence. He said that a few days later UNIFIL was again trying to investigate and a group of civilians gathered and threw stones and obstructed the mission's freedom of movement. He said UNIFIL disengaged to avoid further escalation but 14 peacekeepers were lightly injured. LeRoy said the appearance of a large group of civilians--many of whom were allied with Hizballah--was not a spontaneous event based on the level of apparent organization. Lastly, he described the July 17 crossing of the Blue Line into Israel by Lebanese civilians who ignored UNIFIL's injunctions to stop, and said Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora and PM-elect Hariri both assured UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams that there would be no more such incidents.

¶4. (C) Except for China, which noted concern and called on the parties to refrain from escalating tensions, the other P-5 members called the incident a violation of 1701. French Deputy PermRep Lacroix said he was very disturbed by the briefing, which showed a clear violation of the resolution, and called on all parties to cooperate with the joint LAF and UNIFIL investigation. Lacroix noted particular concern with the injuries to the French soldiers of UNIFIL who were "attacked for carrying out their mandate." He said the incident demonstrated a need to reflect on "daily implementation" of 1701, and noted that France would shortly be preparing a draft renewal of the UNIFIL mandate. He also commented that it is important to maintain the status quo, precarious as it is, especially with regard to overflights, respect for borders, and arms smuggling. Russian Deputy PermRep Dolgov said, "LeRoy said the explosion was a clear violation of 1701; it is hard not to agree." Dolgov, however, said with the results from the investigation still pending, the Council should not jump to "hasty conclusions." He stressed that UNIFIL must have unhindered access wherever it goes, and that the requirements of 1701 also apply to Israeli overflights of Lebanon. He said Israel must respect the sovereignty of Lebanese territory, and violations should not be categorized: "any violation of 1701 is a violation." He mentioned the recent arrest by the Lebanese authorities of suspected terrorists in Southern Lebanon, saying this demonstrated that extremist elements, possibly Al-Qaida, are present. Ambassador Wolff drew on points in reftel and added that a common theme among all Council members was the need to respect the ceasefire and encourage UNIFIL and the Government of Lebanon to work together to move forward. UK Counselor Williams said the explosion is a clear violation of 1701 and

USUN NEW Y 00000721 002 OF 002

that the UK is concerned that Hizballah continues to maintain caches of arms in the south of Lebanon, which is destabilizing to the region. Lastly, Williams said the UK "condemns in the strongest possible terms" the attacks on UNIFIL soldiers.

¶5. (C) Libyan Deputy PermRep Dabbashi said there are repeated violations of resolution 1701 perpetrated by Israel, which continues to violate Lebanese territory. Dabbashi continued that the arms were probably being collected and stored in preparation for their destruction, and the violation more probably lies simply in not informing UNIFIL of their presence. Dabbashi said it was inappropriate to draw conclusions now before the investigation has completed but noted the arms found at the site were not usually used by Hizballah. He noted that the Lebanese letter to the Council said that the UNIFIL confrontation with civilians was due to lack of coordination between UNIFIL and the LAF. He also said people in the region are very sensitive to trespassing on their property or in their houses and viewed it as an assault on their honor. It was for this reason, according to Dabbashi, that civilians became angry and obstructed UNIFIL soldiers. (DPKO U/S LeRoy referenced this assessment in his concluding remarks and stressed that UNIFIL had not tried to enter homes independently of the LAF, with which it coordinated closely.) Dabbashi closed by saying that "the explosion might not constitute a violation of 1701 under normal circumstances. The focus should be on continuing daily Israeli violations.

¶6. (C) Of the non-permanent members, Japan, Croatia and Burkina Faso explicitly noted a clear violation of 1701; Uganda made an oblique reference saying, "Violations aggravate an already volatile situation." Without directly naming Hizballah as the responsible party, most delegations made unequivocal references to it as the culprit. Costa Rican Deputy PermRep Guillermet said the political development of Lebanon must go hand-in-hand with the disarmament of militia groups, and arms smuggling and obstruction of UNIFIL's freedom of movement were serious events. Costa Rica said the Security Council cannot remain indifferent to continued violations, including Israel's

incursions into Lebanon. Japanese Minister Miyajima said the existence of weapons between the Blue Line and the Litani show a clear violation of 1701. Virtually all non-permanent members said they welcomed the ongoing investigation into the incident and looked forward to its results. They also stressed the need for absolute freedom of movement for UNIFIL troops.

¶ 17. (C) LeRoy then responded to a handful of questions from Council members. In answering the UK's question about whether relations between UNIFIL and the Lebanese population were deteriorating, LeRoy responded unequivocally that this was not happening and that cooperation between the mission and the populace was good and improving. The incident in Khirbat Slim was an isolated event. In response to Ambassador Wolff's query about how the international community and UNIFIL could prevent a repeat of such incidents, LeRoy said that further cooperation between UNIFIL and the LAF is essential and the two organizations are already working to improve that cooperation. Moreover, he said UNIFIL Commander Graziano is reaching out to local officials such as mayors to enhance cooperation and coordination between UNIFIL's activities and those of the local populace. In response to Ambassador Wolff's second query about the possible existence of other such caches, LeRoy said UNIFIL is unaware of any others and would immediately inform the LAF if it received any evidence of their existence, adding that just because UNIFIL does not know of other caches does not mean they do not exist.

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